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SUBJECT: FINLAND: SUPPORTING TURKEY'S EU ACCESSION PROCESS

REF: SECSTATE 150087

Classified By: POLOFF DAVID ALLEN SCHLAEFER FOR REASONS
1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) The Government of Finland supports Turkish accession to the EU and the start of accession talks in October. Former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari chaired the EU Independent Commission on Turkey exploring the question of Turkish membership; the Commission published its report earlier this year and recommended an early start to accession talks. Ollie Rehn, the EU's Commissioner for Enlargement, is a Finn and strongly supports early initiation of accession talks. Both Finnish Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen and President Tarja Halonen are vocal supporters of Turkish membership.

12. (C) Halonen addressed the issue as recently as August 11 when she said that critics who claim Turkey's Islamic roots are problematic are "oversimplifying" the issue. Halonen said that while Christian values are important in the EU, Christianity "does not have a monopoly on democracy," and that Turkey frequently has been considered a part of Europe over the past several centuries. Vanhanen has said that Turkish inclusion in the EU could play an important role in improving relations between the West and the Islamic world, and in stabilizing the general situation in the Middle-east. Foreign Minister Tuomioja is also a supporter of Turkish EU accession.

13. (C) Outside of the GoF, opinions on Turkish accession are less sanguine. The opposition Conservative Party opposes accession talks if the outcome is "predetermined," and on August 15, the former Chairman of the Conservatives, Ville Itala, wrote an op-ed in Finland's major newspaper (Helsingin Sanomat) decrying Turkish accession as an example of the EU's "Napoleonic megalomania" for expansion. Some Green Party politicians have expressed serious reservations about Turkey's human rights practices, particularly discrimination toward and the abuse of women.

14. (C) Even within the governing Social Democrat Party-Center Party coalition, many parliamentarians and activists are less than enthusiastic about rapid movement toward Turkish accession, especially with Germany's Angela Merkel possibly poised to become Chancellor (and, presumably, change Germany's stance in intra-EU deliberations). Some strong Finnish supporters of the EU Constitution privately blame the Turkish accession question for the failed referendum in France and the Netherlands, and have opined that the EU pushed the Turkish issue too fast and too soon for European citizens. Opinion polls in Finland are mixed, and many Finns seem to share at least a certain degree of skepticism about Turkey joining the EU.

15. (C) Comment: Halonen and Vanhanen both personally support Turkish accession, and the GoF's official position is unlikely to change in the near term. Outside of senior circles, however, "anti-accession" sentiment, or at least a desire to slow the process down, has grown in some quarters. Finland will probably continue to support Turkish membership as long as the consensus to support it remains intact among the major EU players, and possibly even if such consensus frays; but if Germany changes its official position on accession, or if the EU's "accession coalition" begins to fall apart, the GoF is unlikely to be a leader on the issue and try to keep accession on track. There is no downside to approaching the GoF and expressing our concern over the current situation and support for the October round of talks. However, convincing Finland to be a leader within the EU on the issue will be more difficult. Finland will largely follow whatever the emerging consensus is in Brussels and will steer clear of any significant intra-EU fight over Turkey.

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